

Limerick Prison is a remand and committal prison for male prisoners from counties Clare, Limerick and Tipperary and for female prisoners from the Munster area. This is a closed medium prison.

Average male numbers for 2020; 194. Lifers; 11

Average female numbers for 2020; 27. Lifers; 2

2 male “lifers” progressed to Open Centres.

There were 2 deaths in custody during 2020. The Visiting Committee would like to offer its sincere sympathy to the families of these prisoners.

2020 was a very challenging year for Limerick Prison because of the COVID pandemic. The work of the Governor, staff and prisoners to keep COVID at bay has been very successful up to the present time. There has only been one positive case in the prison population. A further 10 fresh committals tested positive, all of which were in isolation so no spread occurred.

The Visiting Committee stopped visiting the prison at the end of March 2020 and hope to return to the prison in July 2021. The Visiting Committee had two meetings outside the prison in 2020 and the Chairperson was in weekly contact with the Governor. There were also five Chairperson’s Zoom meetings in 2020.

The committee made prisoners aware that they were available for video calls at any time during our enforced absence. However this process was not availed of.

During 2020 video visits went from 15 to 20 minutes in duration. These were very popular and given on demand, within reason. There was also an increase in phone calls during this time. Child access visits and TUSLA visits on video were ongoing during 2020.

A COVID audit took place by Infection Control and the internal audit rating received was ‘Positive Assurance’.

Progress in prisoner cash lodgements through bank transfer or through Post Offices have now 100% take up in Limerick leading to big cost savings on prisoner’s families.

The new build which will house 110 male prisoners and 60 female prisoners is nearing completion despite two lockdowns. It is hoped to be up and running by January 2022.

The staff ration for 2020 was 208.5.

All workshops were open all the time during 2020. The school was closed in line with the community. However, educational materials were provided to prisoners via teachers. Exam students were prioritised. Training to prisoners via Zoom in Alternative to Violence (AVP) was carried out. The groups were smaller due to social distancing issues. AVP also piloted their 'Facing up to Conflict' distance learning in Limerick which proved a big success.

Also introduced was a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) course for female inmates. This was also run by Zoom with the Limerick Mental Health Association. 2020 also saw the introduction of the NCEF foundation course by the gym WTOs.

Drug use in Limerick Prison remains a major issue. Also access to psychiatric beds for those prisoners in need of care continues to be a major problem.

Conversations on gender balance regarding the Visiting Committee have been ongoing. In 2019 Limerick had three male and one female member. Three new members were added in 2020. The make up of the members now reads six male and one female member. This really is of no help to the gender balance of the Visiting Committee.

The Visiting Committee hope that 2021 will bring an end to the COVID Pandemic and that they can resume their visits to the prison. Once again to mention the staff and the prisoners for their successful efforts in keeping the pandemic at bay.